

# How can you prevent COVID-19?

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Several prevention measures can reduce the risk of catching the SARS-CoV-2. People can transmit the virus even if they do not have symptoms, so it is important for everyone to take precautions even if they do not feel ill.

- Avoid close contact with other people, meaning within six feet.
- Avoid crowded indoor settings.
- Wear a mask or cloth face covering indoors and in crowded outdoor settings.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently and thoroughly.
- Use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your mouth, nose and eyes.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow.

Changes in prevention guidelines over time reflect an evolving understanding of how the new virus spreads. Early guidelines emphasized cleaning surfaces, although it later became apparent that this is not a common route of transmission. Public health experts initially advised against wearing face coverings, largely because medical masks for health care workers were in short supply. This advice changed when it became clear that people could unknowingly spread the virus without having symptoms. Similarly, it has become clear that most outdoor activities pose a low risk.

Physical distancing, [wearing a face covering](#) and moving activities outdoors are key prevention measures. Cloth face masks don't filter out virus particles like N95 masks do, but they do block respiratory droplets that carry the coronavirus. Make sure your mask fits snugly and completely covers your mouth and nose.

More stringent measures may be implemented if the virus is spreading more rapidly. These include avoiding contact with people outside your household, staying away from public gatherings, working from home and closing schools. Some areas have implemented stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders and closure of nonessential businesses.

Quarantine is a more individualized approach that requires people who might have been exposed

to the coronavirus to stay at home or in a designated facility for a certain period of time. Stricter isolation practices are important when a person is known to have the virus.

Coronavirus tests with a rapid turnaround time and the ability to do quick contact tracing if someone tests positive can reduce the need for stay-at-home orders and quarantines.

There are also some measures you can take to lower the risk of developing severe COVID-19 if you do catch the virus. These include quitting smoking, maintaining a healthy weight and getting treatment to manage preexisting health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes or HIV.

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